

JOHN MARX HOUSE
108 Main Street
Menasha
Winnebago County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WI-305

HABS
WIS,
70-MENA,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
Post Office Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHN MARX HOUSE

HABS No. WI-305

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WIS
70-MENNA,
1-

Location: 108 Main Street; Menasha, Winnebago County, Wisconsin; Lot 11 of Block 7, Original Plat

Present Owner: City of Menasha; 175 Main Street; Menasha, Wisconsin 54952

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Awaiting possible relocation to a new site, original site to be occupied by an office plaza.

Significance: The John Marx House is of local architectural significance as a fine example of the High Victorian Italianate period of construction.

Distinguished by such Italianate features as cornice brackets, molded window caps, and a Mansard bay roof, the Marx house is Queen Anne in its plan configuration and roof form. Few residential examples of this style are extant in Menasha.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. PHYSICAL HISTORY

1. Date of Erection: 1882
2. Architect: Unknown

3. Original and Subsequent Owners: John Marx, L. D. Coatello, G. E. Forkin
4. Builders, Contractors, Suppliers: Unknown
5. Original Plans and Construction: Not known to be extant.
6. Alterations and Additions: Front entry modified in the early 20th century to create a vestibule and separate entrances for the first and second floor offices.

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Marx house was constructed during a period of local economic growth. In 1881 new owners aggressively promoted the redevelopment of the Menasha water power and utilized the proceeds to construct a second power canal. Industry expanded rapidly: the Whiting Paper Company was established in 1882, the Gilbert Paper Company in 1887, and the Howard Paper Company, the Strange Pail Company, and the Menasha Wood Split Pulley Company in 1888. By 1890 local newspapers reported statistics that showed Menasha leading the state in manufacturing improvements per capita, exceeded only by Milwaukee in terms of actual expenditures. During these growth years the population expanded from 3,144 to 4,581 and Upper Main Street assumed the general appearance of an urban streetscape.

John Marx was a prominent businessman and industrialist. Best known as a merchant tailor, Marx was president of both the Neenah and Menasha Gas and Electric Light Company and the John Strange Paper Company (Menasha Preas; 5/4/1882, 3; 3/26/1892, 1). He also served on the board of directors of

the Island Paper Company and the First National Bank of Menasha (Menasha Record; 1/12/1907, 1; 2/9/1905, 1; 1/18/1920, 1). His house on Main Straet was conatructed in 1882 (Menasha Press; 4/20/1882, 3). The house was occupied by the Marx family until the turn of the century, afterwhich it became a rental property and was converted into a duplex (Sterling's 1920 Directory of Neenah-Menasha, 55). By 1931 it had been converted into tha dental and medical officaa of L. D. Costello and G. E. Forkin (1931 Neenah-Menasha Directory, 15). Thereafter the second floor was converted into two apartments while tha first floor continued to house office/service uses.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. GENERAL STATEMENT

1. Architectural Character: The John Marx Houae is a two-and-one-half story masonry rasidence built during the Victorian Italianate period of construction. The plan configuration is rectangular with projecting pavilions on the south, east, and west. On the east pavilion is a one-story polygonal bay with a Mansard roof. Few residential examples of this style are extant in Menasha, the more noteworthy representatives being commercial structurass found in the Uppar Main Street Historic District (NRHP 1984), the Carl Koch Block (2 Tayco Street, NRHP 1986), and the Menasha City Hall (124 Main Street, NRHP 1984).
2. Condition of Fabric: Good

B. DESCRIPTION OF EXTERIOR

1. Overall Dimensions: The approximate building dimensions are 30' x 70'.
2. Foundations: The foundations are rock-faced ashlar limestone.
3. Walls: The walls are yellow brick with a stretcher bond.
4. Structural System: Unknown.
5. Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Bulkheads: The front stoop is located on the southwest corner and is fabricated from brick and poured concrete. The side porch is at the northeast corner and is constructed of poured and block concrete.
6. Chimneys: The central chimney is yellow brick and of contemporary construction. The north (rear) inside end chimney is corbelled yellow brick and probably original.
7. Openings: The modified front entry consists of a broad segmental arch. Door openings onto the northeast side porch follow the size and ornamentation of the window openings. The fenestration provides a formal counterpoint to the building's irregularity, and consists of segmental arch windows with double-hung, single-pane sash. The windows are enriched by incised lintels and molded brick and limestone window caps.

8. Roof: The roof form is hipped with large cross-gables. The roofing material is sheet metal with a standing ridge. Decorative features include incised vergeboards and corner brackets.

C. DESCRIPTION OF INTERIOR

1. Floor Plans: The floor plan appears to have followed the side hall plan, but has been extensively modified. The vestibule provides access to the first floor office/retail unit and the second floor apartments by two separate doorways. The remaining first floor area utilizes the original parlors, dining room, kitchen, and pantry as a beauty salon. On the second floor, what were four bedrooms and a bath are presently two three-room apartments.
2. Stairways: The staircase to the second floor is single flight and enclosed. The treads, risers, and handrail are wooden.
3. Flooring: The flooring varies with each room and includes wood, carpet, tile, and vinyl.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: The walls and ceilings are lath and plaster. The kitchen has tongue-and-groove wainscoting.
5. Openings: Doorways and windows are similar in size and proportion. The doors were all removed prior to acquisition by the city.
6. Interior Trim: Oak trim appears to be used on both floors, with architrave molding around the doors and windows.

7. Hardware: Original hardware has all been removed prior to acquisition by the city.
8. Mechanical and Electrical Equipment: Numerous alterations removed all original systems and fixtures.

D. SITE

1. General Setting and Orientation: The John Marx House is located adjacent to the Menasha City Hall on the western end of the central business district. Situated on a small lot in a mixed commercial and residential area, it overlooks the U. S. Government Canal and some of the mills associated with John Marx.
2. Historic Landscaping Design. The site does not reveal any original landscape design except for a large maple near the southeast corner of the lot and an old vine near the bay.
3. Outbuildings: No outbuildings are extant.

PART III. SOURCES OF PROJECT INFORMATION

A. ORIGINAL ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS.

None available.

B. EARLY VIEWS.

Augustin, C. F. "Semi-Centennial Edition of the Menasha Press." Menasha Press, 1898. Menasha, Wisconsin.

C. INTERVIEWS.

None available.

D. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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1880. Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

Lawson, Publius, Virgilius Jr. History of Winnebago County. C. F.
Cooper & Co., 1908. Chicago, Illinois. Two volumes.

Smith, Alice E. Millstone and Saw. State Historical Society of
Wisconsin, 1966. Madison, Wisconsin.

Titus, William A. et al. History of the Fox River Valley. S. J.
Clarke Publishing Co., 1930. Chicago, Illinois. Three volumes.

E. LIKELY SOURCES NOT YET INVESTIGATED

Unknown

F. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

The site of the Marx house is included in the footprint of a three-story office building to be constructed overlooking the recently completed Menasha Marina. Both projects are jointly referred to as the Menasha Harbor Development Project. Development of the marina by the City of Menasha required a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers to breach the canal retaining wall. The Corps granted the permit upon completion of the compliance process under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. One requirement of this process was that the City actively offer the Marx house for sale and relocation for a period of six months prior to demolition, with the proviso that the house could be temporarily relocated to permit construction of the office building. The temporary move has taken place, and the house awaits a purchaser.

Prepared by Peter J. Adams

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